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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how university research faculty balanced undergraduate teaching with their other professional responsibilities, noting how discipline and rank influenced their efforts to balance their work responsibilities. Interviews with 97 faculty members from the University of Texas at Knoxville, the University of Texas at Austin, and Ohio State University asked open ended questions about what graduates should learn in their discipline, how faculty can best teach to enhance student learning, and how personal, departmental, institutional, and state policy factors influenced their approaches to teaching. Analysis for the study focused on participants' responses to the question about how they balanced undergraduate teaching with other faculty responsibilities. Data analysis indicated that half of the respondents found it difficult to balance teaching with other faculty responsibilities. The lower their rank, the more difficult they found it to balance their roles. About half of the respondents managed to find balance by fragmenting their teaching, research, and service roles. They either focused on a role at a time or cut back on one role altogether. Nearly one half of the assistant professors reduced one role, and they often said that the role cut back was teaching. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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# Balancing Teaching with Other Responsibilities: Integrating Roles or Feeding Alligators

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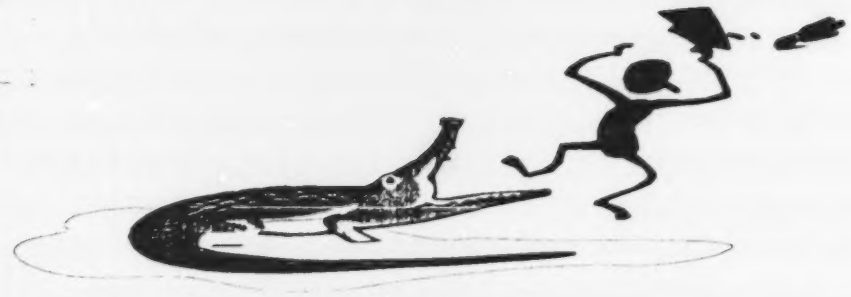

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**Balancing Teaching with Other Responsibilities:**
**Integrating Roles or Feeding Alligators**

Carol L. Colbeck
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The purpose of this study was to explore how research university faculty balance undergraduate teaching with their other professorial responsibilities. During the last 15 years, the higher education community has buzzed with conversations about and efforts for improving undergraduate teaching. Biting attacks on selfish research-obsessed professors such as Sykes' (1988) *Profscam* squeezed for space on trade bookstore shelves while Boyer's (1990) call for an inclusive consideration of faculty roles, *Scholarship Reconsidered,* topped the circulation lists among comprehensive university administrators. The National Science Foundation and the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education poured money into undergraduate education reform. Various state accountability policies have attempted to scrutinize institutional efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching (Burke & Serban, 1998). With a few exceptions, these efforts focused on improving teaching while ignoring faculty members' other responsibilities. In the meantime, faculty have experienced neither decreasing pressure to publish nor diminishing suggestions to serve their various communities. Rather, research university faculty have been expected to demonstrate improved teaching efficiency and effectiveness while increasing their publication productivity and stretching their service to "outreach" as ambassadors of their institutions and disciplines. It is not as if research university faculty are slacking; the latest National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty statistics indicate that public research university faculty work, on average, 55.8 hours per week (Zembler, 2001).

This study was part of a field-initiated study funded by the US Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement for the purpose of improving theoretical and practical understanding of the ways that faculty member's motivations and opportunities to contribute to undergraduate students' learning are enabled or constrained by features of their work contexts. To understand how to develop appropriate institution- or department-level policies to enable faculty to balance their multiple roles, this study investigated faculty members' own attempts to balance undergraduate teaching with their responsibilities for graduate education, research and service. The study, therefore, addressed the following questions:

1. How do research university faculty balance undergraduate teaching with their other faculty responsibilities?
2. How -- if at all -- do discipline and rank influence faculty members' efforts to balance their work responsibilities?

Faculty member's perceptions of their other responsibilities necessarily shape they ways they contribute to student learning. The ways that research university faculty cope with their multiple roles may reveal problems with current structure of professional

expectations that need addressing; their occasional successes may also suggest methods that other faculty might use to meet their own multiple role expectations.

## Conceptual Framework

Theoretical and empirical literatures on role expectations, time management, disciplinary context, and tenure status provide the framework for this the study. A role is the set of expectations of a person occupying a social position. An individual in a single position can perform multiple roles (Katz & Kahn, 1966), even as faculty perform teaching, research, and service. Faculty may experience role conflict if they perceive the expectations of one role are incompatible with expectations of another role they must perform. Specifically, faculty may perceive role competition when they believe they cannot meet the expectations of two roles because of limited time (Secord & Backman, 1964). Faculty may, however, reduce role strain by merging two apparently conflicting roles and by engaging in tasks that fulfill expectations for both roles (Marks, 1977).

Individuals have differing perceptions of time that may vary according to several dimensions (Schriber & Gutek, 1987). These dimensions, including scheduling, autonomy, allocation of time to different tasks, awareness of time use, future orientation, and time boundaries between home and work, may affect the nature of work in organizations. Lim and Seers (1993) related workers' perceptions of these time dimensions to indicators of firm performance, and found that allocation of time, future orientation, and awareness of time use were associated with manufacturing firms' performance. The social context of a department or work group can foster a collective sense of having too much to do within available time (Perlow, 1999).

The social context of an academic department is influenced by its disciplinary body of knowledge (Braxton & Hargens, 1996). Disciplinary differences in developing new knowledge shape differing approaches to time and role management. Competitive pressures to be the first with the latest discovery propel a fast publication pace in the hard sciences; the recursive nature of knowledge expansion in the humanities leads to a more leisurely publication pace (Becher, 1989). Faculty members working soft disciplines are more likely to prefer teaching than faculty in hard disciplines (Carnegie, 1989), and English faculty are more likely that physics faculty to integrate teaching and research by discussing their current research interests in the classroom (Colbeck, 1998). This suggests that faculty in soft disciplines may find it easier than faculty in hard disciplines to balance teaching with their other responsibilities. Faculty in working in disciplines concerned with application of knowledge may face additional pressures to balance teaching and research with service and outreach.

Although tenure is primarily a guarantor of academic freedom, it is also associated with job security. Tenure-seeking assistant professors face pressures to develop new classes, learn from experience how to teach, while conducting and publishing enough research to gain the respect and recommendations of colleagues inside and outside their own institutions (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Gmelch and associates (1986) found that tenured associate professors also experience more stress about time

constraints than full professors. Thus, experience and job security may help senior faculty balance their faculty roles more easily than their junior colleagues.

## Methods

In the context of the larger study about faculty contributions to student learning, one-hour interviews were conducted with faculty at three public research universities in four disciplinary departments that varied by hard/soft and pure/applied dimensions (Braxton & Hargens, 1996): business management, literature, engineering, and physics. The purposive sample (Patton, 1990) of faculty each department included assistant, associate and full professors who were nominated by their department chairs as excelling in either teaching or research, or both. The research team conducted a total of 97 interviews with faculty at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK), the University of Texas at Austin (UTA), and Ohio State University (OSU). The complete interview guide asked faculty open-ended questions about what graduates should learn in their discipline, how faculty can best teach to enhance student learning, and how personal, departmental, institutional and state policy factors influenced their approaches to teaching and research. Analysis for this study focused on faculty members' responses to the question, "How do you balance undergraduate teaching with your other faculty responsibilities?" For a variety of reasons, not all the 97 faculty were asked the responsibilities balance question. A few faculty who were asked never responded directly to the question. (It makes one wonder how these faculty respond to students' questions!) A total of 78 faculty from the three universities addressed the question, and that number provides the basis for indicating the strength of trends that emerged from analysis of the responses. Respondents are categorized by rank and discipline in Table 1.

**Table 1: Faculty Who Discussed Responsibilities Balance at Three Universities by Discipline and Rank**

| | *Full* | *Associate* | *Assistant* | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Business*** | 8 | 6 | 3 | **17** |
| ***Literature*** | 9 | 5 | 6 | **20** |
| ***Engineering*** | 9 | 7 | 6 | **22** |
| ***Physics*** | 10 | 5 | 4 | **19** |
| **TOTAL** | **36** | **23** | **19** | **78** |

Transcriptions of audio-taped interviews were analyzed for emergent themes. Faculty members' responses focused on three issues: (1) how difficult it is to balance teaching and other responsibilities, (2) managing their faculty roles, and (3) managing time. Each of the 78 responses addressed at least one of three issues; some addressed two, and a few talked about all three issues. Within each theme, faculty members' responses clustered in each of three secondary thematic areas.Further analyses involved determining patterns of responses across faculty ranks and disciplines. Given the non-random nature of the sample, the findings are not generalizable to any population. Rather, the open the open-ended nature of the question allowed individual faculty to discuss what was most salient to them. The results suggest themes and patterns that can and should be explored systematically with larger populations of faculty.

## Perceived Difficulty in Balancing Roles

In many cases, faculty members' first reaction to the balance question was a quick expression of how difficult it was—or wasn't—for them (See Table 2). An Ohio State physicist provided a colorful answer that illustrated both the challenges he faced in trying to accomplish all his responsibilities -- and how he shared lessons learned from years of experience:

> I never know what the answer to that question is. . . . Several years ago, [I was asked,] "how do you teach the students to prioritize things?" And I said, "Sir, I teach thme to do the same thing that I do." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Feed the alligator that's closest to my butt."

Half the faculty who discussed balance considered it "difficult," "hard," or said, "I don't know how I do it," or "I haven't solved that one yet." A few did not find balance a problem. For example, one Ohio State business associate professor said right off, "It is really not a problem for me," and a colleague of the same rank obviously subscribes to the Nike "just do it" philosophy. A few faculty didn't say straight out that the job was hard, but talked instead about how they had improved with time and experience.

**Table 2. Perceived Difficulty**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Not a Problem*** | • It is really not a problem for me. (OSU Business)<br>• You make sure you're given your teaching assignment, and you know what you're trying to accomplish in terms of research, and you know what your service obligations are, and you just do it. (OSU Business) |
| ***Difficult*** | • It is very, very difficult. (UTA Engineering)<br>• It's really hard and I don't feel that I do an entirely good job of it. (UTK Romance Literature) |
| ***Experience Helps*** | • I think I've gotten better at balancing it over the course of four and a half or five years. (OSU Business)<br>• I've gotten better over the years. (UTK Business) |

Table 3 indicates the overall strength of the secondary themes, and compares faculty responses by discipline. Percentages in the right hand column indicate how many faculty in each group addressed the theme of perceived difficulty in any way. In this sample at least, literature and engineering faculty found issues of perceived difficulty more salient than did physics faculty. Nearly half the 78 faculty who addressed the balance question, regardless of discipline, felt that balancing their work roles was difficult.

| Table 3. Perceived Difficulty by Discipline | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Discipline** | **No Problem** | **Difficult** | **Experience Helps** | **TOTAL** |
| Business | 18% | 41% | 18% | 76% |
| Literature | 10% | 65% | 25% | 100% |
| Engineering | 9% | 55% | 36% | 91% |
| Physics | 11% | 32% | 11% | 53% |
| **TOTAL** | **12%** | **49%** | **19%** | **79%** |

Table 4 shows how faculty of different ranks perceive the ease or challenge of balancing teaching with other work responsibilities. The majority of respondents brought up the issue of perceived difficulty, but assistant and associate professors did so much more than full professors The perception of difficulty seems to decrease substantially with rank. These percentages are not meant to suggest results that can be statistically inferred to a larger population. But these numbers tell a dramatic story for 78 research university faculty. The story is all the more dramatic because they were selected for being among the best teachers, researchers, or both.

| Table 4. Perceived Difficulty by Rank | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rank** | **No Problem** | **Difficult** | **Experience Helps** | **TOTAL** |
| Full | 8% | 33% | 25% | 64% |
| Associate | 13% | 57% | 22% | 91% |
| Assistant | 16% | 68% | 11% | 95% |
| **TOTAL** | **12%** | **49%** | **19%** | **79%** |

**Managing Faculty Roles**

In the course of their responses, the faculty at OSU, UTK, and UTA often talked about how they managed their teaching, research, and service roles. Many talked about arranging their work lives so they could focus on one role at a time. Faculty either apportion their work week, like the Austin engineer, or their calendar year, like the Ohio State business associate professor quoted in Table 5. A few faculty described how they integrated work roles, such as by bringing their research into the classroom. The two examples quoted in Table 5 are both from engineering faculty, one an associate professor at Ohio State and the other from an assistant professor at University of Texas, Austin, who said, "What is best is when I can get something from one of my research or consulting projects, where I can tell [students] what really goes on in a bigger environment. Other faculty confessed they cope by reducing or even eliminating effort in either their teaching, research, or service role. An Ohio State physics professor, for example, cut back on university service. Assistant professors, such as the business faculty from Knoxville quoted in Table 5, were more likely to say they were reducing attention to teaching.

| Table 5. Role Management | |
|---|---|
| ***One Role at a Time*** | • I try to do all my teaching on Tuesdays and Thursdays, all the preparation, everything. (UTA Engineering)<br>• I do almost no research or writing except in the summer. (OSU Business) |
| ***Integrate Roles*** | • In examples I use in class, homework problems I assign, exam problems I make up, they're all related to my research. (OSU Engineering)<br>• What is best is when I can get something from one of my research projects … where I can tell [students] what really goes on in a bigger environment. (UTA Engineering) |
| ***Reduce One Role*** | • I try to avoid committees. (OSU Physics)<br>• I've made some choices where I cut back on things that I've done with students. (UTK Business) |

Table 6 indicates the overall strength of the secondary themes in relation to role management, and compares faculty responses by discipline. Eighty-six percent of the 78 faculty who responded to the question about balance discussed some aspect of role management. Physicists were less likely than faculty in other disciplines in this sample to discuss role management issues. Nearly half the sample volunteered information about how they focused on one role at a time—and business faculty in this sample were especially likely to do so. Over one-fourth of the sample informed us that they managed by reducing effort in one of their faculty roles—and English faculty in this sample were especially likely to say they did so. Only 14 percent of the 78 faculty volunteered some information about how they integrated two or more work roles—and engineers were more likely to do so than other faculty in this sample.

| Table 6. Role Management by Discipline | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Discipline** | **One Role at a Time** | **Integrate Roles** | **Reduce One Role** | **TOTAL** |
| Business | 71% | 6% | 24% | 100% |
| Literature | 35% | 15% | 50% | 100% |
| Engineering | 37% | 32% | 18% | 86% |
| Physics | 42% | 0% | 16% | 58% |
| **TOTAL** | **45%** | **14%** | **27%** | **86%** |

Table 7 shows that assistant and associate professors were more likely to discuss issues of role management than full professors, just as with the issue of perceived difficulty. The most striking difference in accounts by rank shows up in the "reduce one role" column. Among faculty in this sample, nearly half the assistant professors volunteered information that they were cutting back on one role—and that role was usually teaching. In contrast, only 19 percent of the full professors and 22 percent of the associate professors discussed reducing one of their faculty roles.

| Table 7. Role Management by Rank | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rank** | **One Role at a Time** | **Integrate Roles** | **Reduce One Role** | **TOTAL** |
| Full | 33% | 14% | 19% | 67% |
| Associate | 57% | 17% | 22% | 96% |
| Assistant | 47% | 11% | 47% | 100% |
| **TOTAL** | **45%** | **14%** | **27%** | **86%** |

## Managing Time

The faculty at OSU, UTK, and UTA also responded to the balance question in terms that are reminiscent of time management literature. Some faculty, such as the physicists quoted in Table 8 frankly volunteered in one way or another that they did not feel they could plan their work lives effectively. So the Knoxville associate professor just "juggles things," and the Ohio state assistant professor talked about working by responding to alarms—classic crisis management. Other faculty told us that they may not achieve balance, but they managed to accomplish most of what they needed to by working long hours. The Ohio State associate professor of engineering was one of many who estimated killer 65- to 80-hour work weeks. The assistant professor of literature at Austin quoted in Table 8 illustrates how many faculty detailed all the tasks that contributed to their long hours—and this quote is greatly abbreviated! A third group of faculty described how planning helped them achieve some semblance of balance. An assistant professor of business at Knoxville blocked out time to achieve control as well as balance, and an OSU literature professor said that all that was necessary was to simply "keep a calendar."

| Table 8. Time Management | |
|---|---|
| ***No Plan*** | • I just juggle things. (UTK Physics)<br>• I don't think I have a method other than when an alarm goes off, put it out, I guess. (OSU Physics) |
| ***Work Long Hours*** | • I work 80-hour work weeks. (OSU Engineering)<br>• I put a great deal of preparation time before the class, I have students coming by my office hours to talk to my about various issues … and I grade their essays, I read the novel … so that I can be perfectly prepared to do the discussions. This all takes lots and lots of hours. (UTA English) |
| ***Budget & Plan*** | • It's important to me to look at the fifty and sixty hour block at a time that I see out there every week … I make decisions about using that time, rather than other people holding those decisions on me. (UTK Business)<br>• Just keep a calendar. (OSU English) |

Table 9 shows that about three-fourths of the faculty interviewed at the three research universities talked about balance in terms of time management. All the

engineers did so, in contrast to only half the literature faculty, with the business and physics faculty falling midway between. About one-third of the sample described ways they budgeted or planned their time, and another third talked about managing by working long hours.

| Table 9. Time Management by Discipline | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Discipline** | **No Plan** | **Work Long Hours** | **Budget & Plan** | **TOTAL** |
| Business | 6% | 29% | 35% | 71% |
| Literature | 0% | 15% | 35% | 50% |
| Engineering | 14% | 45% | 41% | 100% |
| Physics | 26% | 32% | 21% | 79% |
| **TOTAL** | **12%** | **31%** | **33%** | **76%** |

As shown in Table 10, all the associate professors in this sample talked about balance in terms of time management, in contrast to 3/4 of the assistant professors and 61 percent of the full professors.

| Table 10. Time Management by Rank | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rank** | **No Plan** | **Work Long Hours** | **Budget & Plan** | **TOTAL** |
| Full | 11% | 22% | 28% | 61% |
| Associate | 13% | 43% | 43% | 100% |
| Assistant | 11% | 32% | 32% | 74% |
| **TOTAL** | **12%** | **31%** | **33%** | **76%** |

## Summary and Implicatons

Among this select sample of excellent research university teachers and researchers, half the respondents found it difficult to balance teaching with other faculty responsibilities. Not surprisingly, the lower their rank, the more difficult faculty found it to balance their roles. Since it seems to come more easily with experience, senior faculty who have achieved balance should share their strategies with their junior colleagues. Role balance should be an essential task of mentoring new faculty.

Even among this sample of faculty designated as "excellent," half managed by fragmenting their teaching, research and service roles. They either focused on role at a time or cut back on one role altogether. It is most disturbing that nearly half the assistant professors in the sample reduced one role—and often said the role "cut back" was teaching. More can be learned, however, from those few faculty (14 percent in this sample) who accomplished more by engaging in activities that fulfilled two roles at the same time. Such role integration is consistent with observations by Colbeck (1998) and Krahenbuhl (1998) and should be encouraged and rewarded.

Although the language of respondents who had no plan for their time was more colorful, the time management practices of the "planners" provided more insight into how to cope with too many responsibilities. Faculty members who demonstrate skill at managing time effectively may provide guidance and support for their colleagues, showing them how to "make decisions about how to use that time rather than other people holding those decisions over me."

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